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Carol X Weakley 11/09/2006 02:48:59 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004465

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: PERETZ AND AMBASSADOR KICK OFF AMA NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Defense Minister Amir Peretz told the Ambassador on November 6 that despite the threats Israel is facing, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) will do everything possible to improve the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He said that he, as defense minister, has made decisions to improve the humanitarian situation that were implemented regardless of the opposition of his senior military staff. He cited his decisions to keep Rafah open two days per week despite threats, and to issue orders for the IDF to reduce friction between Palestinians and settlers during the olive harvest. According to Peretz, it is important to find the balance between humanitarian needs and threats, and "the needs sometimes outweigh the threats." The Ambassador said that part of the political strategy to improve Palestinians' lives is to implement the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA). He presented Peretz documents detailing the Embassy's goals, staffing, and agendas for various AMA working groups, and a paper on negotiation procedures and timetables. Peretz endorsed the negotiations, but said that the MOD needed more time to staff up and organize for the talks. End summary.

Difficult Times in Israel...

12. (C) Defense Minister Amir Peretz told the Ambassador on November 6 that their meeting was occurring as "the usual dilemma for Israel" is taking place vis-a-vis fighting in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip. He said that on one hand, the IDF has to fight terrorist elements without harming the Palestinian population, which is sometimes a difficult distinction to make. On the other hand, the GOI cannot allow rockets to be fired into its sovereign territory on a daily basis and stay indifferent to the damage done to its own population. He commented that the GOI would have to examine

how to strengthen Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas when dealing with the fighting in Gaza. He noted that the debate on whether to increase or decrease the tempo and intensity of operations in Gaza is important and very real, and he said that he personally felt that fighting against Hamas helps Abbas, because Hamas is strengthened if it commits terror attacks without being punished for its actions. He opined that the people of Beit Hanoun "in their hearts" really do not want to see Hamas take refuge among them, even if they cannot say so publicly.

...But Committed to Improving
Humanitarian Situation

13. (C) Peretz continued that despite any threats of attacks to Israel, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) will do all that is possible to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground in both the West Bank and Gaza. He cited as an example orders that he gave for the IDF to reduce the friction between settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank during the olive harvest, and claimed that as a result, even though the crop is much bigger than in recent years, there have hardly been any incidents during the harvest. He commented that it is imperative to make a distinction between terrorists and civilians, and that for this reason it is important to implement LTG Dayton's security project for Karni as soon as possible.

14. (C) Peretz also underlined that Israel's security policies are decided by the political echelon of the MOD, and anything he decides as defense minister will be fully implemented, despite any contrary positions provided by "my intelligence." He said that there are many warnings of threats against Rafah, and that the GOI has proof that the passage is being used by senior terrorist elements to transfer funds and know-how into Gaza. Regardless of the intelligence, however, he has issued orders that the crossing should be open at least two days per week, and his orders are being followed, he claimed. He explained that the opening days for the crossing may vary throughout the week, so that terrorists cannot anticipate operating hours, but that the crossing is open nevertheless. Peretz reiterated that his decisions as defense minister are implemented, and cited as an example that Israel last week approved the entry of Palestinian businessmen from the West Bank into Israel, as well as 1,000 additional workers from the northern West Bank "under the regular age." According to Peretz, it is important to find the balance between humanitarian needs and threats, and "the needs sometimes outweigh the threats."

AMA Talks to Begin Soon

15. (C) The Ambassador said that there can be no purely military solution to the situation in Gaza. To combat terrorism successfully, we also need a political strategy. Part of our political strategy is to improve Palestinians' lives and strengthen Abbas against Hamas by implementing the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA). He commented that the Secretary was here one month ago, that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is going to the U.S. in less than a week, and that it is high time to make some progress on implementing the AMA. He reiterated that Hamas cannot be defeated by military action alone. He noted that violence fills political vacuums, and emphasized that the AMA is an important component of the overall strategy to move the political process forward. The Ambassador reported that staff members from the MOD and Embassy have been working to prepare a number of papers to begin talks on implementing the AMA, and offered Peretz copies of the documents. (Note: These documents have been forwarded to NEA/IPA. End note.) He told Peretz that the documents include a goal paper, agendas for working teams on crossings, convoys, West Bank-Gaza Strip link, obstacles to movement, Palestinian economic development, and Palestinian social development. He

also presented the Embassy's organizational chart detailing the staff involved in each of the working groups, a document on the procedures that should take place during the negotiations, such as reporting of meeting outcomes and agreed minutes, and the Embassy's expectations on the frequency of meetings. He suggested that the core groups, led by the DCM on the U.S. side and MOD Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilad on the Israeli side, have a meeting that same afternoon, so that the working groups could begin their work the following day. The Ambassador emphasized that the goal of the discussions is to quickly move to trilateral meetings with the Palestinians. He noted that the Embassy also wants to re-new the discussions on realizing Israel's commitments to the USG regarding settlements and outposts.

16. (C) Despite MOD staff assurances, Peretz made clear that he had not been fully briefed in advance. He offered to study the papers with his senior staff, and to send to the Embassy in the afternoon or the following morning the names of the heads of each of the working groups. The Ambassador pushed for a meeting of the core groups in the afternoon, but Peretz replied that the MOD was not prepared, and that the earliest it could happen would be the following day. The Ambassador said that he understood that the Embassy had proposed an ambitious timeline, but the U.S. is concerned about continued delay and wants to begin a political process to give Palestinians hope. Peretz responded that the MOD would organize itself that day, and inform the Embassy of when it was ready to start the talks. MOD Chief of Staff Mike Herzog communicated the MOD's names for working groups to the DCM on November 7. The Ambassador subsequently met with Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilad (septel) and will meet with Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh on November 9 to further organize the negotiations.

17. (C) The MOD's list of working groups is as follows:

-- Sneh: Palestinian economic development, obstacles to movement, West Bank-Gaza Strip link.

-- Ashkenazi: Crossings, Karni.

-- Mishlev: Palestinian social development. (Note: This has since changed, but we are unaware of who will chair this group on the GOI side. End note.)

-- Gilad: Rafah.

The MOD also made clear that they would not agree to a separate working group on convoys at this time.

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JONES